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Youth Awarded for Crop-Scouting Skills at 2015 Competition

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Youth Awarded for Crop-Scouting Skills at 2015 Competition

ICM News

September 25, 2015

By Daren Mueller and Adam Sisson, Department of Plant Pathology and Microbiology

Farming involves tough questions, such as determining if a fungicide should be applied to corn for northern corn leaf blight, or figuring out if yellow patches in a soybean field are caused by sudden death syndrome, a nutrient deficiency or a different disease.

Crop scouting, along with knowing what questions to ask and clues to be on the lookout for, can help determine the right answers to these issues and many others. Educating the next generation of farmers is a goal of Iowa State University's Integrated Pest Management program.



Identifying weeds was one of many topics at the competition.

To provide students with an opportunity to learn crop-scouting skills, along with integrated pest management (IPM) basics, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach hosted the fifth annual Crop Scouting Competition for Iowa youth on Aug. 4, 2015.

"Equipping future farmers and agronomists with crop scouting skills will help the next generation of farm decision makers with crop production and land stewardship skills," said Daren Mueller, Iowa State University assistant professor and extension specialist in plant pathology and microbiology. Eleven student teams from Iowa high schools competed in the event.

The annual competition was created to increase high school students' awareness of Iowa agriculture using hands-on learning and teamwork. Topics at this year's event included crop diseases, insects and disorders, weed identification, estimating corn yield, crop growth stages, soil sampling, deciphering aerial imagery and using a tablet-based scouting app. A representative from the Iowa Certified Crop Advisers board also spoke to teams about careers in agriculture.

One of the benefits of the competition is that it allows teams to get outside the classroom and use their skills. Another benefit is that the field stations are run by ISU Extension and Outreach specialists and event sponsors such as Iowa Soybean Association and ScoutPro.

"When the students are learning directly from the professional experts about crop scouting basics, this early knowledge is valuable in the future to both the family farm, as well as for Iowa's agriculture industry," said Mueller.

Judges based their scores on how well teams did at each of the 11 scouting-themed field exercises. At the end of the competition, teams and their leaders participated in a meal and were awarded certificates and monetary prizes between \$50 and \$500.



2015 Crop Scouting Competition first place team led by Joe and Suzanne Shirbroun from Clayton County. The Shirbrouns have participated in all five crop scouting competitions and for each of the first three years have had at least one team member enroll at Iowa State University as an agronomy major.

First place was awarded to a Clayton County team led by Joe and Suzanne Shirbroun, Pioneer independent sales representatives from Farmersburg. The Shirbrouns brought another team which placed fourth. A close second place was awarded to the student team from Denison, led by Randall Kuhlmann of Kuhlmann Seed. Third place went to the Guthrie Center FFA team led by Jim Calvert, agricultural instructor at Guthrie Center Community School.

"Teams work really hard to prepare for the competition – both students and team leaders," said Adam Sisson, extension specialist for the Integrated Pest Management program. "Organizing a team, setting aside time for practicing during the summer, teaching scouting skills and attending the competition may be a time commitment, but worth the investment."

Next year's competition will be Aug. 2, 2016, at the ISU Field Extension Education Laboratory (FEEL) west of Ames, at 1928 240th St., Boone. More information will be posted on the Integrated Pest Management website [www.ipm.iastate.edu/cropscouting] when it becomes available. Email Adam Sisson at ajsisson@iastate.edu to be added to the 2016 competition contact list for details.

The contest was sponsored by DuPont Pioneer, Iowa Soybean Association, Iowa Certified Crop Advisers, Iowa Independent Crop Consultants Association, ScoutPro, USDA-National Institute of Food and Agriculture and ISU Extension and Outreach faculty and staff.

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